



2018 HOMECOMING MUSICAL

Wonderful **TOWN**

OCT. 12, 13 & 14, 2018
(325) 674-ARTS (2787)
acu.edu/theatre



Study Guide

By Jillian Jackson



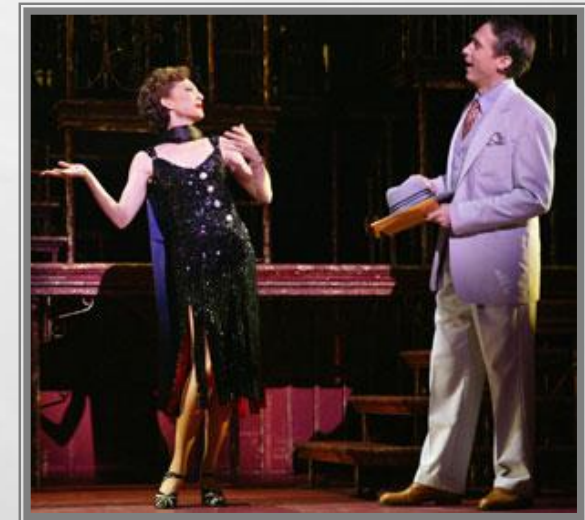
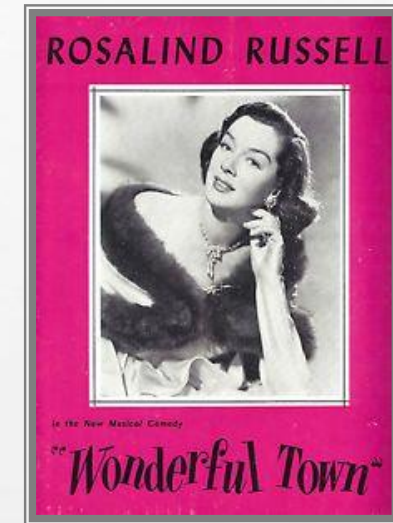
THE HISTORY OF THE PRODUCTION



From Broadway, to the Big Screen, and Back Again

The musical *Wonderful Town* was first a Broadway play in 1940 called *My Sister Eileen*. It was based on the memoirs and stories a woman named Ruth McKenney wrote about she and her sister, Eileen's, real-life adventures. You may notice that the two female leads of *Wonderful Town* share the same first names as these two sisters! Joseph Fields and Jerome Chodorov served as the playwrights of *My Sister Eileen*, which was soon turned into a movie of the same name in 1942. Finally, our musical *Wonderful Town* made its Broadway debut in 1953 with a book by Fields and Chodorov again, this time joined by Leonard Bernstein as the composer and Betty Comden and Adolph Green as the lyricists. *Wonderful Town* included George Abbott as the director and Rosalind Russell (pictured top right) in the role of Ruth. This production won five Tony Awards including Best Musical and Best Performance by a Leading Actress in a Musical (won by Rosalind Russell).

Other *Wonderful Town* productions of note were the West End Premiere in 1955 and the Broadway Revival in 2003 starring Donna Murphy as Ruth (pictured bottom right) and with direction and choreography by Kathleen Marshall.



The Creative Team

Jerome Chodorov **Book-writer**

Chodorov lived from 1911-2004 and in that span of time he wrote over twelve Broadway plays. An interesting fact about him was that in the 1950s, he was blacklisted as a member of the Communist Party and had a difficult time finding work from then on.

Joseph A. Fields **Book-writer**

Fields was born in NYC in 1895, attended NYU, and then enrolled in the American Expeditionary Force during WWI. He first started writing screenplays, then went on to write Broadway plays.

Betty Comden **and** **Adolph Green** **Lyricists**

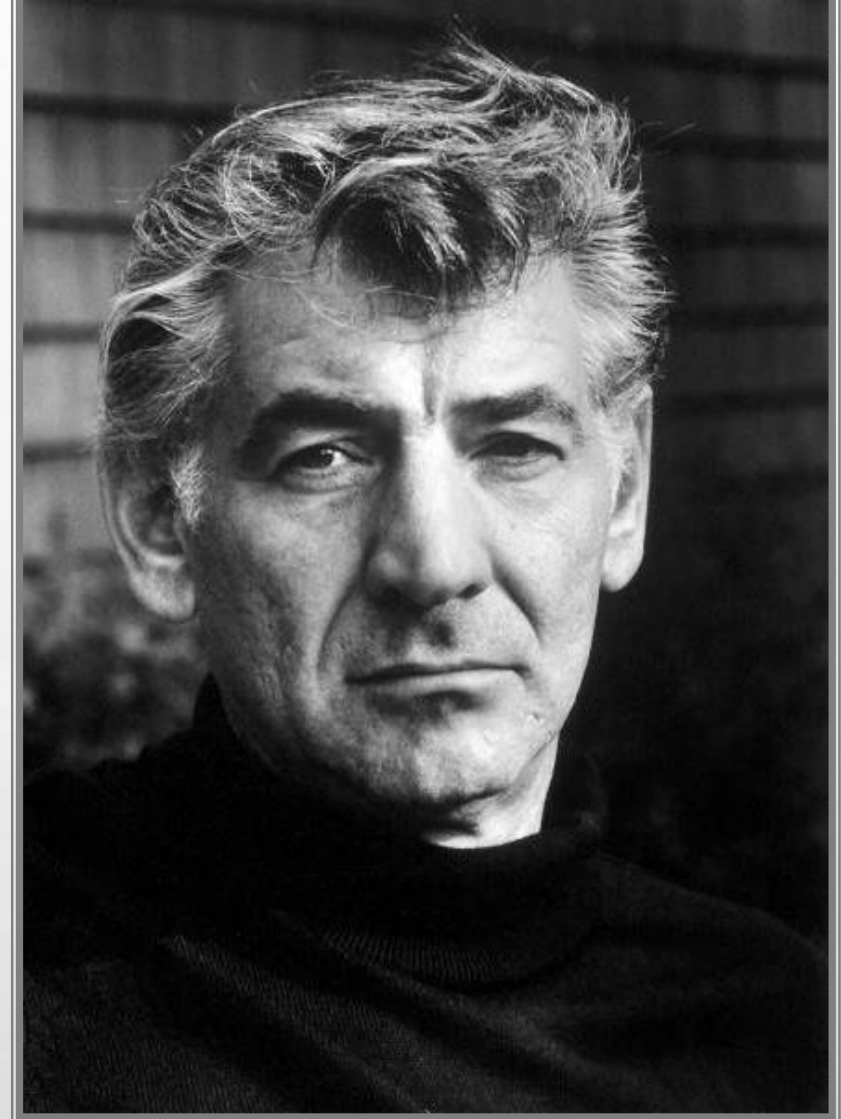


Comden and green were playwright/lyricist partners for a long time. In fact, they hold the record for the longest pairing of a Broadway writing team. Comden attended NYU while Green was a wall street runner during the great depression. The pair met in 1938 and first worked with Leonard Bernstein on *On the Town*, then went on to work with him on *Wonderful Town*.

Leonard Bernstein

Composer

Leonard Bernstein gets his own section, because one of the reasons we chose to do this production was to celebrate his 100th birthday! He was born in Lawrence, Massachusetts on August 25, 1918. Bernstein majored in music at Harvard and became a renowned conductor. In addition to musical theatre, Bernstein has also composed ballets, symphonies, and choral and chamber works. Originally, *Wonderful Town* had a different composer assigned to the project, who dropped out at the last minute. Having worked with Bernstein before, Betty Comden and Adolph Green finally convinced Bernstein to join the team.



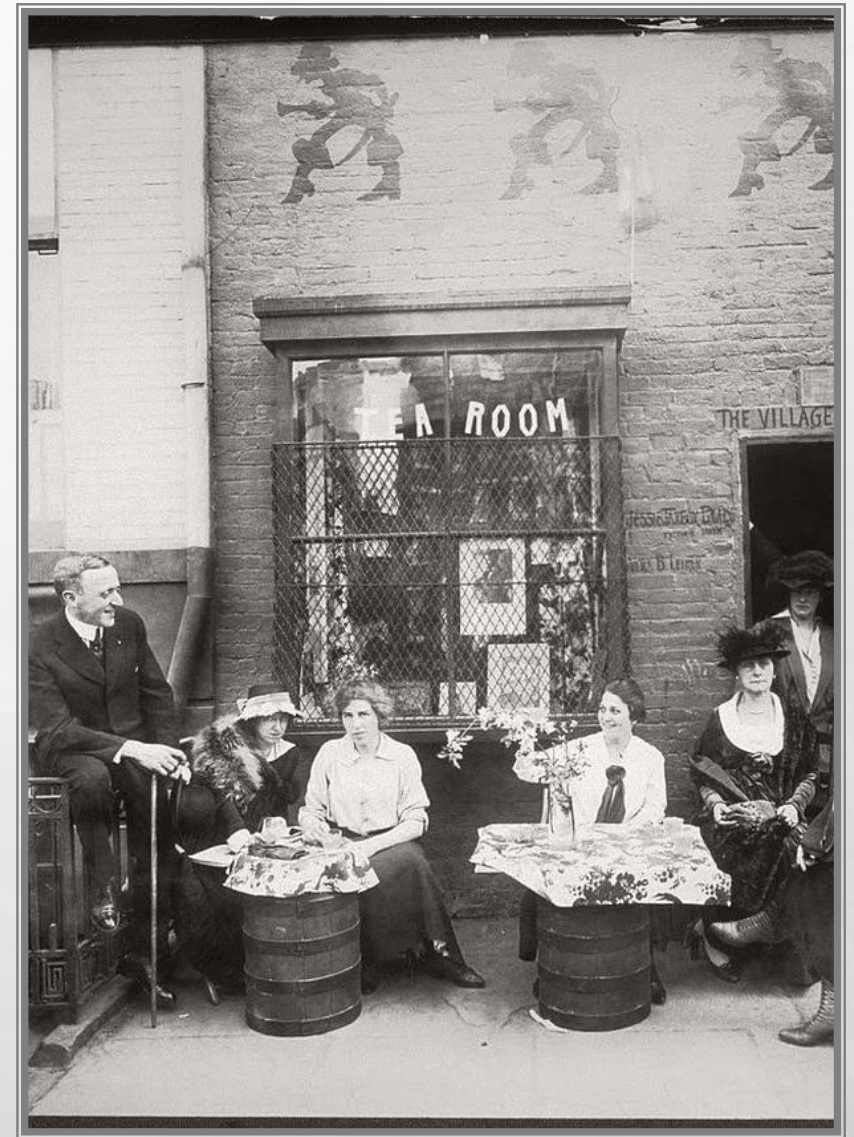
Setting

Wonderful Town is set in
Greenwich Village, New York
City, New York, in 1935.



The “Bohemian Cradle”

In the first musical number of the show, “Christopher Street,” the Guide leading a group of tourists through Greenwich Village calls the Village a “Bohemian Cradle.” This is because, around this time, Greenwich Village was becoming a popular hangout place for artists and radicals alike. The Guide also mentions many streets in Greenwich Village and the surrounding areas, which you can see on the map below.



Make it Your Own

Because this show is set in the 1930s, there are lots of slang words and phrases used by the characters that are no longer common today. Below, you will find a list of these words and phrases (some from the show, some not) and their meanings. With a partner, create a 2-3 minute, cohesive scene using as many of these as you can.

Word/Phrase

Meaning

All wet

No good

Blow your wig

Become very excited

Brodie

A mistake

Cats or alligators

Swing music fans

Drip

A weak or ineffectual person

Greaseball

An unpopular, disreputable person

Grifter

Con man/woman

Hock

To pawn

Hornswoggled

Deceived

Word/Phrase

Meaning

Juicy

Enjoyable

Louse it up

Mess it up

Kibosh

Squelch

Make tracks

Leave in a hurry

Nuts!

Nonsense!

Ring-a-ding-ding

A good time at a party

Scrub

Poor Student

Slip me five

Asking for a handshake

Sugar foot

A term for a sweetheart

Matching

Here is a list of people referenced in Wonderful Town, see if you can match each with its description.

- | | | |
|--|--|----------------------|
| 1. _____ Associate Justice of the Supreme Court from 1882 through 1965 | 7. _____ Also known as Anna Dym; a panhandler in the Broadway Theater District | A. Dizzy Dean |
| 2. _____ “Father of Physical Culture” | 8. _____ The creator and host of a radio talent show | B. Helen Wills |
| 3. _____ Child actress during “talkie” era | 9. _____ Attempted to convince New York to abolish the death penalty | C. Charles G. Dawes |
| 4. _____ Author famous for writings on etiquette | 10. _____ Tennis player | D. Helen Hayes |
| 5. _____ Professional baseball player | 11. _____ 30 th Vice President of the United States | E. Broadway Rose |
| 6. _____ Called the “First Lady of American Theatre” | | F. Emily Post |
| | | G. Warden Lawes |
| | | H. Bernarr MacFadden |
| | | I. Major Bowes |
| | | J. Felix Frankfurter |
| | | K. Mitzi Green |

Themes

Wonderful Town touches on themes such as love, gender roles, art, and social status, but there are many more themes that could stand out to individual audience members that other people might not consider. For example, our director for this specific production mentions the religious—specifically Christian—elements of this show. What are some of the themes you notice? Pick one and provide specific examples from the show that highlight that theme.

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